

Part II: Cottage Grove Community & Parks System Overview

There Are Parks

*There are parks that have moons that are bright enough to see behind a black cloud.
There are parks with kids so soft-hearted, they are bright inside.
Do you have a moon like that?*

***-by Danae Perkey
Bohemia Elementary School, 2nd Grade***

Community & Park System Overview

The following section provides an overview of Cottage Grove – its history, development patterns, natural characteristics and current population statistics. Cottage Grove’s recreational system –including types and facilities, non-governmental opportunities, finance and surrounding recreational opportunities are also included in this overview.

A. COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

Cottage Grove is rich in tradition and enjoys an outstanding natural setting in the upper Willamette Valley of Oregon. The City lies on the relatively level, narrow flood plain of the northward-flowing Coast Fork of the Willamette River, approximately 20 miles south of Eugene. Originally settled in the early 1850’s by pioneers arriving by wagon train, the city was officially incorporated in 1900 after gold mining and timber harvesting caused the area’s population to expand from 750 in 1890 to 1800 in 1910.

Currently, Cottage Grove is the largest community within the 655-square mile Coast Fork watershed and serves as the area’s major trade center. Interstate 5, which follows the historic route of Hwy 99 north/south along the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Canada, bisects the city. Hwy 99 and the Oregon Pacific Railroad also run north/south through the approximate center of the city. Cottage Grove’s historic commercial center bisects Hwy 99 and the Railroad, and retains its early 20th century feel. Residential neighborhoods spiral out from this center. Commercial and industrial uses are concentrated along Hwy 99, Row River Road and Main Street.



Coast Fork of the Willamette River, viewed from Swinging Bridge

2. Natural Environment

Rivers

Three waterways, including the Coast Fork of the Willamette River, the Row River and Silk Creek, flow through the City. These rivers form the backbone of the City's natural areas system and give the city much of its distinctive character and history. Native cutthroat trout, steelhead, Chinook and Coho salmon are the main fish species found in the river system. The waterways also include many of the City's reflective recreation areas, historic sites and corridors for both human and wildlife travel. Upstream Corps of Engineers reservoirs on the Coast Fork and Row River now control most flooding on these two streams.

Topography

Surrounded by forested hills at the base of the Willamette Valley, Cottage Grove is framed by its topography. Knox Hill, Mt. David, Bennett Creek Hillside and White Hills have been identified in "The City and its Hillside" as having their own unique set of geomorphic, vegetative and visual qualities.



View across city from Mt. David

Mt. David's profile is visible to residents of downtown and the historic Northwest Neighborhood. Mt. David is also prominent from Highway 99 or the Cottage Grove Connector off of Interstate-5. Mt. David was an important cultural site to the Kalapulya and other native peoples, as well as to the original white settlers. The butte witnessed several historical community events, such as Rev. Olson's oil well swindle in the 1920s, motorcycle races and the establishment of the McFarland Cemetery. Mt. David also provided recreational opportunities to the early settlers, who used the mountain as their

chief recreation site, to current residents who continue to hike, picnic and enjoy its scenic views.

The City does not own any hillside land, excepting the water reservoirs on Knox Hill. Development of land above 740' in elevation is currently limited due to lack of a high-level water reservoir.

Flora and Fauna

The vegetation in Cottage Grove has, like much of the vegetation in the Willamette Valley, been altered by immigration. Early settlers found the Willamette Valley a host to broad prairies, with wide forests of cottonwood, alder, willow, ash, maples, and fir along the river corridor. The Willamette River meandered through the valley, creating swales and marshes as the channel changed courses. The low hills were populated with oak trees. For thousands of years the Kalapulya lived in the Valley and annually set fires that controlled the growth of underbrush. With the arrival of the pioneers, the vegetation was substantially altered as forests were cut to build houses, land cleared for farming and rivers and streams dammed and channelized, resulting in the loss of wetlands and other traditional habitats. Most of the original plant communities were extinguished and exotic plant species now crowd out many of those native plant species that remain.

Nonetheless, Cottage Grove remains rich in natural flora and fauna. Large native trees, including Douglas fir, oak and floodplain species along the river, define the landscape. The City, residents and businesses have planted trees in their yards and along some of the streets. Cottage Grove is consistently recognized as a Tree City USA, reflecting the importance trees play in defining local character. Numerous local nurseries provide easy access to climate-appropriate plants.

There are no documented wildlife corridors through Cottage Grove, but the Willamette River Greenway, Silk Creek and Row River likely provide the best wildlife corridors through the City. Little if any attention has been paid to maintaining wildlife connectivity between riparian and upland habitat.

3. Built Environment

Crossings

Cottage Grove is split along its north/south axis by several natural and human made features, including the Coast Fork of the Willamette, the railroad tracks, Interstate-5 and Highway 99. Crossings over the Coast Fork include: multi-modal bridges at Highway 99 north of the City, Woodson Bridge, Main Street, Harrison Avenue and Highway 99 south of the City; pedestrian bridges including the Swinging Bridge and the Centennial Bridge (near City Hall); and Chambers Bridge, a covered railroad bridge that is currently non-traversable. There are automobile underpasses for Interstate-5 at the intersections of Taylor Avenue, South 16th Street and Main Street and an overpass along Row River Road (the Cottage Grove Connector).



Row River Trail underpass under Interstate-5

The Row River Trail travels underneath I-5 at a remarkably open and bright location. Local volunteers regularly pick up litter, sweep up glass and paint over graffiti, making this an attractive pedestrian and cyclist underpass.

Historic Sites

There are multiple cultural and archeological sites important to the Kalapulya Native American tribe in and around Cottage Grove, including: a former village near Bennett Creek, a camp at the Western Oregon Exposition fairgrounds, the Kalapulya trace along the west bank of the Coast Fork (now River Road), a swimming hole at 6th and Gibbs, burial sites along the slopes of Mt. David and a culturally important rock outcropping at the base of Mt. David that remains in use for spiritual purposes.

Multiple historic sites from the early white settlement years of Cottage Grove remain visible today. These include, but are not limited to: the 1925 J.H. Chambers Railroad Bridge crossing the Coast Fork south of Harrison Avenue; the cellar and part of the first floor of an 1870 grist mill at the present location of the Old Mill Farm Store on South River Road next to Silk Creek; the 1925 Cottage Grove Manufacturing Company wigwam burner at Trailhead Park where the Row River Trail enters Main Street; the 1902 route of the O.S. & E. (Oregon South Eastern railroad, known as the “Old Slow and Easy”) serving the Bohemia mines, lumber mills, post offices, and creameries east of Cottage Grove, which became the route of the 1914 Galloping Goose passenger train, and is now utilized as the Row River Trail; the 1930 Oregon National Guard building on Washington and 8th, which has hosted a dance hall, roller skating rink, and gymnasium over the years; the 1930s 4-H Fair which grew into the ongoing Western Oregon Exposition; Dr. Pellets Barn, which was the first barn on the National Register; and the remains of Reverend Olson’s 1920s oil swindle at the top of Mt. David. Most historic sites in Cottage Grove are not owned or managed by the City of Cottage Grove.

Covered Bridges

Cottage Grove is known as the “Covered Bridge Capital of Oregon,” boasting six covered bridges within an easy drive of the City: Centennial Bridge (corner of Main street and River Road in Cottage Grove), Chambers Railroad Bridge (just south of Harrison Avenue along South River Road in Cottage Grove), Currin Bridge (on Layng Road, spanning Row River), Mosby Creek Bridge (on Layng Road, spanning Mosby Creek), Stewart Bridge (on Garoutte Road) and Dorena Bridge (on Shoreside Drive south of Dorena Reservoir). A scenic drive that connects the historic bridges is well signed and publicized by a widely distributed brochure.



Covered pedestrian bridge across Coast Fork of Willamette at Main Street

4. Demographics

Population Growth

Cottage Grove is the largest city within the 655 square mile Coast Fork watershed and the largest city along I-5 between Eugene and Roseburg. It has historically served the area as a major trade center and continues to operate as a full-service city for a regional population.

When the existing Parks and Recreation Master Plan was written in 1973, there were an estimated 6,500 residents in Cottage Grove. The 2000 U.S. Census found 8,445 city residents. Although there was very little growth in Cottage Grove in the 1980s due to the decline in the timber industry, there has been 14.1% change in population between 1990 and 2000, on par with Lane County, but a smaller rate of growth than for the whole state, which grew by 20.4% during the same period.

Between 2000 and 2050, the Cottage Grove population is expected to reach 17,500 residents. Currently the City is projecting a 1.36% growth rate, which results in a population of approximately 11,817 in 2020.

A substantial portion of current residential growth is taking place between South 6th and South 8th Streets, south of Johnson Avenue. Most of this growth consists of single-family starter homes and duplexes. The other two current growth areas are near the Bohemia Elementary School (higher-end single-family homes and an Assisted Living Facility) and by the Village Green Resort (55+ manufactured home community, new hospital and new Assisted Living Facility). A large area designated for a range of low, medium and high-density residential use lies to west/southwest of current city limits. As Cottage Grove's population is projected to grow over the next 20 years, these designated residential lands will likely be developed as residential neighborhoods.

Age of Residents

Cottage Grove's population is both younger and older than the County and State population. In 2000, 30% of the population of Cottage Grove was 19 years old or younger while 16% of the population was 55 years or older. By way of comparison, 26.3% of Lane County's population and 27.6% of Oregon's population were younger than 19, and 13.3% of both Lane County's and Oregon's populations were 55 years or older. Youth and senior citizens are two large user groups of parks, open space and recreation facilities. Cottage Grove contains a disproportionately large number of two particularly intensive park using groups.

Income Level of Residents

Cottage Grove continues to suffer from the decline in the timber industry, with one of the highest Economic Dislocation Indexes of need (17.1 out of the 20.0) in the State. According to a study approved by the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, 59.5% of the population is considered 'low' to 'moderate' income.

A significantly larger proportion of Cottage Grove families are below the 1999 poverty level than Lane County and State of Oregon averages. In Cottage Grove, 15.6% of families, 25.7% of families with children below the age of 18, 33.8% of families with children below the age of 5, 43.3% of mother led families, 49.1% of mother-led families with children below the age of 18, and 71.7% of mother-led families with children below the age of 5 live below the poverty level. In all but the last category, the number of families living below the poverty level is double the state average.

Cottage Grove's relatively large population of families below the poverty line, particularly among younger mother-led families, creates a greater need for access to recreation opportunities. Low-income families have a particular need for parks, open space and recreation services that are readily accessible from their residences.

Lifestyle Effects on Recreation Participation

Lack of time and money are the two greatest barriers to participation in outdoor recreation in Oregon, according to a 1994-1995 Forest Service-University of Georgia survey included in the 2003-2007 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The SCORP document concludes that because of a general squeeze on disposable leisure time, Oregonians are seeking recreational opportunities closer to home.

B. COTTAGE GROVE RECREATION SYSTEM

1. Introduction

The City of Cottage Grove owns or maintains approximately 171 acres of parklands, including mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, natural areas, and greenways. Most of the city's developed parks are mini-parks, many either beautification areas along City streets or nodal parks along the Willamette River Greenway. The Willamette River Greenway, which is the strongest component of the City's park system, travels in a north/south direction through the middle of the city along the Coast Fork of the Willamette River. There are no multi-use parks along the Coast Fork of the Willamette River. Traveling east/west is a second "Greenway" park, the recently developed Row River Trail.



Path along Willamette River Greenway

Cottage Grove has a wealth of floodplain natural resource areas, particularly in the East and North Regional Parks. Two parks, Fort Harrison and the undeveloped Stewart Orchard Park, serve the function of neighborhood parks. Four school parks, spread throughout the community, serve informally as neighborhood parks for neighborhoods without parks. Coiner Park serves as the only community park. The City's community park and neighborhood parks are significantly undersized compared to national parks standards and are overused.

2. Types of Parks Found in Cottage Grove

The following section details the types of parks found in Cottage Grove and gives examples for each identified type. National Recreation and Park Association standards are referenced to provide a method of comparing Cottage Grove's parks with those in similar sized cities around the country. A full inventory of Cottage Grove parks including their facilities and recreational values is included in Appendices "A" through "F".

Inventory of City-owned Parks

Park Name	Location	Size (acre)	Park Type
Coiner Park	East Main St.	6.89	community park
Cottage Grove Skate Park	Hwy 99 & S. 4th St.	0.17	mini park (operated by CGRA)
East Regional Park	Row River Rd.	56.42	natural resource area
Fort Harrison Park	3rd St. & Harrison Ave.	0.39	neighborhood park
Gateway Park	Gateway & Row River Trail	0.14	mini park/beautification area
Kelly Field	Quincy Ave.	3.38	neighborhood (leased by SLSD)
Masonic Park	Row River Rd.	2.1	mini park
North Regional Park	Off Connector	58.7	NR area (26 ac. leased by golf course)
Row River Trail	Main & N. 9th St.	24.9	greenway/nodal
Silk Creek Park	Willamette Court	0.74	greenway/nodal
Stewart Orchard Park	Johnson Ave.	0.73	undeveloped neighborhood park
Trailhead Park	Main & 10th St.	1.04	greenway/nodal
Triangle Park	s. 4th St.	0.12	mini park/beautification area
Westend Park	N St. & Ash Ave.	0.15	mini park
Whiteman Park	H St. & Birch Ave.	0.31	mini park
Willamette Greenway	N. Coast Fork/River Rd.	1.84	greenway/nodal
*Benny Hubbell Park	N. 9th St. & Woodson Bridge	0.25	historical/cultural
*City Hall Park	City Hall, Main St. & River Rd.	1.1	greenway/nodal
*Prospector Park	S. River Rd.	0.725	greenway/nodal
*Riverside Park	S. River Rd.	1.48	greenway/nodal
*Veteran Park	E. Main St. & N. River Rd.	0.67	greenway/nodal
*Woodsoon Park	N. River Rd.	0.84	greenway/nodal

* Node Park on Will. Greenway

TOTAL: 163.07

TOTAL in public use: 133.7

See Park Definitions and Development Standards (Part IV) for more information regarding current Cottage Grove park standards, national recommended standards, other Oregon community standards and updated standards recommended for Cottage Grove.

Note about use of National Standards from the National Recreation and Park Association: Park types, facilities standards and location criteria help the City with park acquisition, development and upkeep. The National Recreation and Park Association

(NRPA) developed standards intended as guidelines for use at the local level. There is, however, no longer a national standard of “x” number of acres of parkland per 1,000 persons. This method of calculation is now recognized as deficient. Current methodology calls on each community to determine its own defining blend of natural, social and economic characteristics. Therefore, each community is given the opportunity to develop its own standard, or Level of Service (LOS), tailored to an appropriate range, quantity and quality of recreational facilities within its fiscal limits. However, it is also cumbersome and expensive for every community to develop an individual standard. NRPA standards used in the following discussion of Cottage Grove park development and location criteria are drawn from the *1996 Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines* produced by NRPA.

a. Mini Parks

Mini parks serve limited recreational needs and also serve as city beautification areas. Excluding the nodal parks along the Willamette River Greenway and Row River Trail, Cottage Grove has 0.34 acres of mini parks per 1,000 residents, which meets the former recommended national standards.



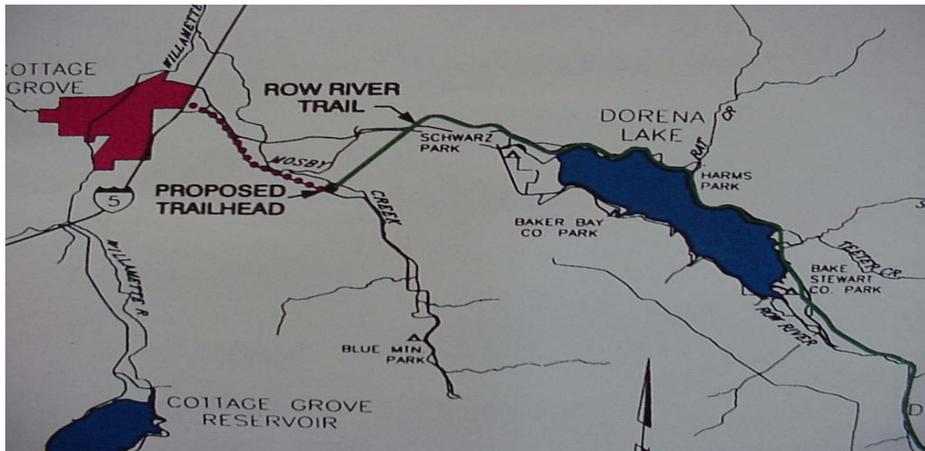
Veterans Park

b. Nodal Parks along Greenways

Nodal parks along greenways serve as waysides along the Willamette River Greenway and the Row River Trail. Waysides allow for park users to stop and rest or picnic along the trail, which is particularly helpful for families with young children, people with disabilities and elderly park patrons. When kept in a more natural state, waysides also increase the ecological function of a Greenway, providing greater buffers and superior wildlife habitat and water quality services. There are no current or former national standards for nodal parks.

The Willamette River Greenway is a defining natural and cultural feature of Cottage Grove. In addition to the Greenway with its associated nodal parks, there are 12 locations along the Coast Fork and Silk Creek where City Right-of-Way extends to the water. One location is developed to allow pedestrian crossing and views of the Coast Fork at the Swinging Bridge off the end of Madison Street. The other 11 locations provide potential for increased recreational access to rivers. Increased access to viewpoints and picnic sites would retain and strengthen this source of community identity.

The Row River Trail is one of the City's newest recreational areas. The Row River Trail Feasibility Study recommends the development of nodal parks along the 18-mile trail.



Row River Trail plan

c. Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood Parks serve as the recreational and social focus of a neighborhood. The average size of Cottage Grove's neighborhood parks is 0.6 acres, well below the former national standard of 5-10 acres. Recommended national standards suggest Cottage Grove should ideally have 16.89 acres of neighborhood parks at its current population. Cottage Grove has 1.12 acres.

d. Community Parks

Community Parks should meet the entire community's recreation and meeting needs. Cottage Grove has one community park, Coiner Park, which, at 6.89 acres, is significantly smaller than the former national standard of 30-50 acres. According to recommended national standards, Cottage Grove should ideally have 42.23-67.56 acres of Community Parks at its current population. Cottage Grove has 6.89 acres. Coiner Park is well-situated in the current middle of Cottage Grove, but as the City grows to the south and west, the need for community park land in the southwest part of the City will increase.

e. Natural Resource Areas

Natural Resource Areas are lands set aside for the preservation of significant natural resources, open space, and visual aesthetics. There are no current or former national standards for natural resource areas. Cottage Grove provides 13 acres of natural resource land per 1,000 residents, located entirely alongside rivers and their associated floodplains. There are no upland natural areas. According to Oregon's 2003-2007 SCORP, Oregonians place great emphasis on natural areas as a means of protecting streams and habitat, creating quiet and beautiful places of refuge and providing educational opportunities.



East Regional Park fishing pond

f. Greenways

Greenways preserve human, wildlife and water corridors linking portions of the community together. There are no current or former national standards for greenways other than for recommended width, which should be a minimum of 50 feet wide, but optimally 200+ feet in width. The Row River Trail Greenway is 60 feet wide, while the Willamette River Greenway is highly variable. Cottage Grove has at present no benchmarks for greenway widths.

g. Historic/Cultural

Very few historic sites are included in Cottage Grove's current park system. The tracks of the OS & E were converted to the Row River Trail, preserving the route, but there is no signage identifying its historic nature. A wigwam burner at Trailhead Park stands as a testament to Cottage Grove's history as a timber town. Buster Keaton played baseball at Kelly Field while filming "The General." The field honored Dorena's Delbert Kelly, the first local soldier killed in World War I.

The City has begun efforts to increase appreciation of the important historical or cultural events that transpired at various City parks. Educational signage in Veteran Park, for example, identifies a segment of the Applegate Trail. A memorial plaque for Benny Hubbell in his namesake park bears witness to the community's appreciation of his dedication to public service.



Benny Hubbell Memorial Park dedication plaque

3. Current Funding Sources

The Cottage Grove General Fund finances maintenance, labor, and supplies for existing parks. The General Fund also covers the Police Department, City Manager's Office, Community Development Department, Library and other essential city services. Similar to many other Oregon cities, there is less money in the Cottage Grove General Fund than is demanded by City services and the funding crisis is projected to worsen in coming years.

Systems Development Charges (SDCs) are collected from new residential development to be used towards acquisition, design, and improvements to new parkland. In Cottage Grove, SDCs are currently being collected at the rate of \$197.53 per new single-family dwelling unit (SFDU), up from \$189/SFDU in 2001. No park SDCs are collected for commercial or industrial development. According to a June 2001 study by Oregon State University titled *Systems Development Charges in Oregon Cities*, of the 18 cities studied with 5,000-10,000 residents, the average parks SDC was \$714/home. Three of the 18 cities have no Parks SDC; one has a Parks SDC for offices of \$7,000. Cottage Grove is charging roughly a quarter of the amount that other similarly sized Oregon cities are charging for Parks SDCs. The amount of funds the City of Cottage Grove is currently collecting from SDCs is not sufficient to acquire, design and develop parkland of any size in developing neighborhoods.

Parkland acquisition is irregular as the City does not have a large fund reserved for park acquisition. Therefore, the City is reliant on land donations (such as the recent donation

of Stewart Orchard Park at the corner of South 8th Street and Johnson Avenue), receipt of major grants (such as the recent development of the Row River Bike Trail) and management of specialized facilities by partners (such as the new Cottage Grove Skate Park managed by Cottage Grove Recreation Association). Some components of the current or proposed parks system will require new funding sources if they are to be developed or acquired.

The City of Cottage Grove has a large number of small parcels of developed parkland. Small parcels of parkland are more expensive to develop and maintain per acre than large parcels of parkland.

4. Non-governmental opportunities

Cottage Grove retains a strong sense of community identity, pride and history as demonstrated by the continued vibrancy of such long-held festivals and recreational facilities as Bohemia Mining Days, Historic Home Tour, Cottage Grove Rodeo, Cottage Grove Speedway and the Western Oregon Exposition. Civic activity is growing, with multiple service groups and individuals actively pursuing the creation and maintenance of park facilities. There are many examples of this resurgence: the Economic and Business Improvement Districts are focusing on aesthetic improvements in Cottage Grove's Historic Downtown; the Lyons Club rebuilt the Coiner Park gazebo damaged in a windstorm; and several individuals have taken on maintenance of the Row River Trail as their contribution to the City. The Superheroes created a miniature park on an empty private lot within the downtown historic district. The Chamber of Commerce Mural Committee instigated the painting of two historic murals, including one at the Superheroes' park of Opal Whitely and one at the intersection of N. 9th Street and Main Street of Buster Keaton.



Opal Whitely mural, 7th and Main Street

There are a number of parks, open space, and recreation facilities in Cottage Grove that are run by entities other than the City. South Lane School District (SLSD) operates a district office, one high school, one alternative high school, one middle school and two elementary schools within City limits. The District has constructed a new high school on the west side of South River Road between Lane Community College and Sweet Lane on what was commonly known as the White Property. Each of the sites includes aesthetically pleasing, well-maintained open space and improved recreation areas.

Together, SLSD sites include six basketball courts, 13 playing fields, two tracks, an indoor swimming pool and two playgrounds. The new high school adds one stadium field and track, a practice football field, two general-purpose fields, five basketball courts (three supporting volleyball), four accessible semi-public restrooms, floral displays, drinking fountains and walking paths. The new high school's sports facilities are designed to host large sporting events, drawing out-of-town visitors to Cottage Grove.

Sports fields and the swimming pool at the old high school are to be maintained and improved. Although school grounds have traditionally performed an important function as neighborhood parks, there is currently no arrangement formalizing this practice.

Private and non-profit parks, open space and recreation facilities include two established golf courses, new destination gardens and an R.V. Park at the Village Green Resort, an active BMX Track sanctioned by the American Bicycle Association, the new Cottage Grove Skate Park managed by the Cottage Grove Recreation Association, the Western Oregon Exposition, the Cottage Grove Speedway, a bowling alley and a large grass field behind the Catholic Church on 19th Street.

5. Surrounding Recreational Opportunities

Cottage Grove is surrounded by parks, open space, and recreation opportunities owned and managed by numerous jurisdictions and agencies, including Lane County, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Cottage Grove Ranger District of the Umpqua National Forest. Cottage Grove has two reservoirs, several streams and rivers and innumerable hiking trails up into the mountains within a 30-minute drive.

Cottage Grove Lake, a flood control reservoir built and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps of Engineers) on the Coast Fork of the Willamette River, is visited by almost a half-million people every year for camping, picnicking, swimming, water skiing, fishing and boating. The Corps of Engineers manages five recreation sites at Cottage Grove Lake, including Lakeside Park, Shortridge Park, Pine Meadows Campground, Primitive Campground and Wilson Creek Park. Combined, the parks have 62 picnic sites, 82 formal campsites, primitive campsites, beaches, restrooms and two boat ramps.

Dorena Lake, a Corps of Engineers flood-control reservoir on the Row River watershed, is visited by over 400,000 people annually. Activities include camping, picnicking, water

skiing, fishing, boating and biking along the 18-mile paved Row River Trail. The Corps of Engineers manages two parks at Dorena Lake: Schwarz Park and the undeveloped Bake-Stewart Park. Lane County also manages two parks at Dorena Lake: Baker Bay and Harms Park. The Bureau of Land Management manages 15 miles of the 18-mile Row River Trail, which includes pit toilets, horse-mounting facilities, benches and numerous scenic viewpoints. Combined, these five recreational facilities provide 131 formal campsites, three boat ramps, picnic tables, toilets and play areas.

Federal, state and local forest-oriented facilities provide 35 formal campsites, picnic areas, restrooms, fishing, swimming, hiking, waterfall viewing and mountain biking along the five-mile Brice Creek Trail, approximately 15 miles east of Cottage Grove. In addition, the Eastern Forest Area provides numerous camping, hiking and mountain biking opportunities. The Forest Service manages four recreational sites in the area, including Rujada, Cedar Creek, Lund Park and Hobo Camp. The Bureau of Land Management manages Sharps Creek Campground. Lane County manages the LaSells D. Stewart and Wildwood Falls Waysides.

There are also numerous informal recreational activities surrounding Cottage Grove, including rock-hounding in the mineral-rich mining area, kayaking along Row River and Brice Creek, bird-watching and touring the area's seven covered bridges.